THE BISHOP'S CHARGE
at the Ordination to the Priesthood
of
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Synod of Hong Kong & Macao Diocese
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"You know what hour it is, how it is full time to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed." Romans 13.11.

"The Time is Now." This is the title of the Anglican Advisory Council's first meeting in Kenya in February of this year. It must inevitably be the theme of every Synod; for we meet to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit for the present, - now in 1971. In our reports and debates we must address ourselves to questions that people are asking now, - not to the problems of long ago. And yet we meet also at a stopping place on a long line of history.

This Diocese is still by constitution, - as well as in our love and prayers, - a part of the Chung Hua Sheng Kung Hui* in which it has been my privilege and the privilege of our senior clergy and lay people to have served, both in Hong Kong and in China. We salute our brethren in China and in every part of the Chinese world, and especially in South-east Asia. We are thankful for the prayers and messages of dioceses in our Council of the Church of South-east Asia, whose delegates we welcomed in Hong Kong earlier this year; and we would assure them, and all of our friends within the family of the Anglican Communion of our fellowship in the Gospel and of our greetings in the Lord.

At the same time we thank God for the continued fellowship and co-operation with our other Christian brethren in Hong Kong and Macao, - the Roman Catholic dioceses, and the Church bodies related to the Hong Kong Christian Council together with others who are happily represented at this opening service of our Synod. We welcome you with Christian greetings and the assurance of our prayers; and we ask that you may convey these good wishes to wider fellowships of Christians in other lands to whom you are related.

The Time is Now, - and this is a perplexing time for many people, - perhaps especially for the younger generation, - and that is why we are glad that the diocesan young people are here as welcome observers at this Synod. The Time is Now, - and even within the Church it is a time of anxiety when people's hearts fail them for fear. Consequently there is throughout the Church some confusion about the task and pattern of the Ministry, and it is on this subject that I wish to offer a few words in this charge to the diocese.

I am convinced in my heart that our Lord Jesus Christ is alone the Founder of the Church and that through Him its ministry is commissioned to proclaim by word and deed His saving and renewing power for humanity. The total ministry of Christ is that of its lay and ordained members. All in their different ways are commissioned to play their parts in the Body of Christ.

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* China Holy Catholic Church

The ordained ministry which has come to us from apostolic times is not however a revised version of the Jewish priesthood, and is not therefore limited to a special tribe or caste. It is the extended priesthood of Christ Himself. He is Himself the "Man for Others", - the "Son of Man" as he called himself, - representing the human race before God, and in this respect he is the New Adam. On the other hand as the Word made Flesh He brings through his own life and self-sacrifice the whole love of God to man. The Church's ministry is therefore also representative of humanity as a whole. The ministers of the Church are not primarily ecclesiastical specialists, but people, - "personae" who by training and aptitude have a basic understanding of theology and of that part of the contemporary world which they are to represent in pastoral care and service and in prayer and liturgy before God.

What is sometimes called the crisis of the ministry, which is felt in many other Church bodies besides our own, springs partly from the fact that many clergy feel that their term of reference is too wide, and that they need to be specialists. While we welcome clergy with special gifts, - and every pastor should develop his particular talents, - we must beware of the longing to become members of some priestly "in-group" endowed with specialist knowledge which we can then dispense to the faithful. In a highly specialized world we need rather to re-emphasize the representative character of the priesthood. No pastor should be so highly trained or so absorbed in education or social service or administration that he has no time or ability to visit and comfort the sick, to help people in their home and family life and problems, and to be available at times of crisis.

But I suspect that the crisis of the priesthood is also related to the fact that for centuries the clergy as a group have belonged to a club for men only, and the priesthood thus loses something of its representative character.

If humanity is to be fully represented before God in the priesthood it is logical to suppose that the ministry which is not limited to people of one tribe or race should not be limited to one sex. As St. Paul said in Christ "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ."

Christ himself raised the whole status of women by the way in which he talked with them naturally and on equal terms. Among the most profound conversations recorded in the Gospels are those with women, - at Samaria, - in the house of Simon the Pharisee, - with Martha and Mary, - and in the words which he spoke with Our Lady, - his Mother, Mary. And we were reminded by one of our clergy recently that the only occasion on which our Lord was anointed, - and as you know the word Christ means the Anointed One, - was at the hands of a woman in Bethany. While He is the initiator of the ministry, women minister to Him at birth, in his life and death and are the first witnesses of his Rising.

Christianity has had a profound influence on the emancipation of women, not least in China, throughout the centuries, and today we see the fruit of the Gospel in the fact that everywhere women are more and more taking their rightful places in society and in family life.

As you well know, during the present century there has been a growing desire in the Church, - and in this I believe we are guided by the Spirit, - that women should take their place in the priesthood. Our diocese has been particularly involved in this development for more than 25 years, and I would like now to outline the position in the Anglican Communion as it stands since the last meeting of our Synod.

You will remember that in January 1970 after due study in each of our parishes, we voted by a very large majority that in principle we were in favour of women's ordination. In duty bound we referred this first to the Bishops of South-east Asia and on their advice, to the first meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council. This body met in Limuru, Kenya in February 1971 and after considerable discussion voted (by a small majority) the following resolution 28b:

> "In reply to the request of the Council of the Church of South-east Asia, this Council advises the Bishop of Hong Kong, acting with the approval of his Synod, and any other Bishop of the Anglican Communion acting with the approval of his Province, that if he decides to ordain women to the priesthood his action will be acceptable to this Council; and that this Council will use its good offices to encourage all Provinces of the Anglican Communion to continue in communion with these dioceses."

This statement represents a remarkable degree of opinion in the highest representative body in the Anglican Communion, and it is one which is addressed directly to this diocese and cannot thus be lightly ignored.

You will recall that the Lambeth Conference Report of 1968 contained a significant section on women's ordination which was presented to us by the Archbishop of York. Speaking of the age-long tradition of a male priesthood he said "If the ancient and medieval assumptions about the social role and inferior status of women are no longer accepted, the appeal to tradition is virtually reduced to the observation that there happens to be no precedent for ordaining women to be priests." And he added, "The New Testament does not encourage Christians to think that nothing should be done for the first time" (Lambeth Conference Report 1968, p.106).

The Resolution of the Lambeth Conference which specially concerns us is No. 37: "The Conference recommends that before any national or regional Church or province makes a final decision to ordain women to the priesthood, the advice of the Anglican Consultative Council be sought and carefully considered." This we have done, and the Anglican Consultative Council has made its reply. I do not think we should disregard the resolution of a body which exists to advise the whole Anglican Communion.

But it is true that the Council of the Church of South-east Asia did not feel ready to endorse the Limuru resolution, though individual dioceses and bishops have assured me that they will stand with us if we go forward to the ordination of women to the priesthood. The C.C.S.E.A. attitude is not altogether surprising for as the Lambeth Conference Report says, "Hesitations in personal attitudes to the ordination of women are often related to cultural factors." We should not expect some other dioceses of South-east Asia to be ready for the step we contemplate, - and we have never wished to force our own conclusions upon others. But as Bishop Hall said on this subject 25 years ago:

"Chinese civilization has always given a higher place to women both in culture and social life than any other civilization apart from Christianity. The Cantonese people have a unique position combining Chinese culture with a quite exceptional commercial energy and ability. Little wonder then that God should have used China's old culture and Cantonese progressiveness to prepare a woman called by Christ to his ministry."

The astonishing developments in Hong Kong and the creative part which women have played in them in the fields of education, law, commerce, medicine, and in the Church's ministry, since Bishop Hall wrote, are a sufficient commentary upon his words.

The C.C.S.E.A. was hesitant on another point, and this was that the Limuru Resolution directed to Hong Kong appeared to be inconsistent with another resolution 28a calling upon the Churches to study the situation and to report back in 1973. I must say that if there is inconsistency it was not of our making; but I would like to offer a suggestion of a way to resolve it. Too often the Church's representatives are told to go away and study a certain situation and this ends in going over old arguments without any concrete examples for guidance. My hope is that Hong Kong will present to the Church some living experience of women in the priesthood, - so that we and others will be able to base our studies on something more than mere speculation. We do not as I say expect that what is suitable in Hong Kong will be suitable everywhere. But I believe that someone has to make a start, and it may be that because of our peculiar position as the only active diocese in the Chung Hua Sheng Kung Hui, God is enabling us to act where others might find it difficult.

This brings me to the question of whether we are acting within our Canon and Constitution. I believe that we are so doing according to Canon 19 which makes no mention in Chinese of the sex of the person to be ordained. The names of the persons to be ordained must be presented and approved by six Vestry members of the parish concerned. This has been duly done in this diocese in the case of three men and two women now in deacon's orders. Approval for ordination of all of them has been given by Standing Committee.

Constitutionally the decision now rests with the Bishop but in courtesy to this Synod and to our brethren in other parts of the Anglican Communion I have made this statement.

But my friends, ordination in the Church of God is not determined by majority votes or the details of the constitution. It is a precious gift of the Holy Spirit which begins when God implants in the hearts of men and women a desire to serve Him. It is continued when their fellow Christians, - that is the Church, - believe that such people are fit to be trained and set aside for this task. Christ intends to make Himself known through their words and action. And when they are ordained by the Bishop it is the Holy Spirit alone who provides the gifts conferred upon them.

Our action in this matter must be determined first by the pastoral needs of the Church in Hong Kong. What others think or may be expected to think, though not unimportant, comes second. There is no doubt in my mind that the three men and two women whose names have been presented to me for ordination to the priesthood should be so ordained. I earnestly ask your prayer and the prayers of the whole Church on their behalf.

I believe that this action will be accepted with great joy and understanding in the Church in many parts of the world. If there are some within our Communion who are disturbed by our proposed action we pray that they will stand with us, recognizing as we have long recognized that in the Anglican family there is diversity in unity, and that in all things there should be charity.

What we are proposing is no deviation in Christian moral standards, no change in creed, no radical break with liturgical order. We remain firm in our love and loyalty to the Holy Catholic Church, - which is our name, "Sheng Kung Hui" in Chinese.

A great saint of the Church, - who was a woman, - once said "The Divine Moment is the Present Moment". As we try to cope with the pastoral needs of a huge population, - in which half of the industrial workers are women, - I believe we are impelled by the Holy Spirit to make better provision for the needs of men and women alike through a ministry more fully representative of humanity as a whole. For the "Time is Now" and I believe we shall find that for Hong Kong and perhaps elsewhere "salvation is nearer than when we first believed".